

Thursday 2/11/2010

My name is Holly Seymour. I am a Program Manager with The Connection Inc's Supportive Housing for Families and Supportive Housing New London. Our office is based in Norwich and we serve the Southeastern Region in Connecticut.

Supportive Housing for Families is a unique program. We not only help families find safe and affordable housing, we also work with families for up to 18 months advocating and supporting them in their quest for continued stability. Every family referred to us is unique but they all have two things in common, they love their children and they are in need safe and affordable housing. Our families are referred to us through the Department of Children and families. They are families who have had a child removed and are about to be reunified. When housing continues to be an unresolved issue, they cannot be reunified.

I will share one family's story with you that truly demonstrates how much lives can change when housing is stable. One of our Case Managers met this family when they were on the brink of despair, living in an unheated one room apartment in a neighborhood known area for drug activity. The family shared one large mattress on the floor with no bedding. This was February. There was a little food in the refrigerator but it wasn't working because there wasn't any electricity, nor was there any heat.

The father had recently been diagnosed with schizophrenia. He spent most of his teenaged and adult years using drugs to dull the daunting aspects of his mental illness. He tried to take his life by drinking a bottle of Clorox. His life was saved and he spent months recovering in a treatment facility.

His wife was battling breast cancer for the second time. She missed many of her chemo treatments due to a lack of transportation and no money for bus tickets. Income was non-existent. The family moved so often that their benefits were soon cut off. They didn't have cash, food stamps, or health insurance. Neither adult could work. They suffered 3-4 evictions and lost most of their furniture and belongings.

The family had one child, a 10 year old boy. His family moved so often he was never in one school for more than a few months. The boy missed so much school that he was held back a grade. He longed to participate in after school sports but there was no money for him. His parents didn't know anyone who could help with transportation and their address was never dependable for long.

A few weeks after meeting with the family, the Case Manager found a wonderful 2 bedroom apartment. The family moved a few days later. There was a nice backyard where their son could play. The apartment had windows in each room and trees to look at instead of ravaged city streets.

Once the family had a stable address, they could re-apply for benefits. They obtained food stamps, health insurance and a small cash stipend. The mother obtained regular medical care because she had a stable address to give med cab. Almost 6 months after the mother was declared "cancer-free" she volunteered to advocate for other women in a local cancer support group which was held weekly at the very school where her son attended. Without housing this mother's health would have deteriorated.

A few months later, the father began working with a Vocational Rehabilitation program and a few months after that; he was employed for the first time in years at a hardware store that he could walk to. Without housing, he wouldn't be able to hold a job.

Their son attended a local elementary school and after a short time, he made a few friends who invited him to join a boy scouts group. The parents of the other boys in his scouting troop learned of the family's plight and they offered rides so that the boy could play soccer and attend a school science fair. While the mother was recovering, they brought hot meals to the family and later, a Thanksgiving basket and Christmas gifts. This connection with people wouldn't have been possible if they didn't have housing.

When Supportive Housing is involved, families become whole again. These families become a vital part of the communities they live in. Please restore the funding to Supportive Housing for Families so that we can help more families. There are hundreds of them on our waiting lists throughout the state.

Thank you.